

## XIX.—INSECTS IN FRUIT EATEN BY BIRDS

*Comment on the supposed frugivorous habits of Woodpeckers.*

On page 122 of the August number of the *Journal* is a record of woodpeckers eating berries on trees with an editorial note remarking that a frugivorous diet is unusual in these birds. It is possible that the individuals observed *were* essentially insectivorous for the berries may have contained insect larvae. Further observations would be interesting.

The fruits of some trees are very badly attacked especially by weevils. Some years ago my small son, in Mussoorie, discovered a tree of *Machilus duthiei*, with a great number of berries, all of which, so far as we could find, were attacked by *Drepanoscelus gardneri* Mshl., a weevil with a very peculiar looking larva indeed. Incidentally there is a great deal that is unknown about insects in fruits and seeds of forest trees and I should appreciate samples sent to my address.

FOREST RESEARCH INSTITUTE,  
DEHRA DUN,  
September 22, 1943.

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## XX.—A TRIP TO THE YALA SANCTUARY.

On September 17th I started from Colombo at 6-30 a.m. with Major M for Yala Sanctuary—180 miles away on South East Coast. We went in M's Ford 8, loaded with kit and with petrol (for which coupons were obtained with difficulty) and arrived at Tissamaharama at about 3-30 p.m. and filmed a small crocodile in the huge tank there. Shortly before Tengalle we passed into the 'dry zone' where the country changed completely into thorn scrub exactly like Coimbatore with rocky bare hills like Mysore. There were many ibis, spoon-bill, cormorants and divers on the tanks. We arrived at 5 p.m., over a rough jungle track at Palatupana where the Sanctuary Warden lives. This is outside the sanctuary. I went out with M and the local Excise Commissioner to watch for elephants coming to drink in the tank behind the bungalow. Just before sunset a three-quarter-grown bull elephant arrived and walked over the bund to drink. I walked up to 25 yards and exposed 20 feet of film before he became suspicious, remounted the bund and after standing there for some time while I filmed him at close quarters decided to make off into the jungle.

On the 18th we motored another 12 miles over a very rough sandy track between almost impenetrable thorn jungle, with the sea behind and jungle covered sand dunes on the right. The next land is the South Pole! The only difference between the Sanctuary and the surrounding jungle is a reinforced concrete notice board pulled to pieces by elephants. This could probably be remedied by a black notice board. It was hot and dry with a strong wind blowing. We saw several wild buffaloes in a wide tank and some wild pig on the shore. I crawled up to the latter through a thorn jungle

to 20 yards and took several feet of film, and afterwards made some long range movies at one of the buffalo bulls who seemed undecided whether to charge or not. After this the Sinhalese tracker advised sitting in a hide of a few branches by a half dry jungle pond. A small family of spotted deer came down and drank while 2 or 3 wild buffaloes crashed away out of the mud as we approached the pond. After going another 4 miles we stopped at another jungle pond where I sat behind a few branches under a thorn tree while M and the tracker took the car on to Yala bungalow. While I was still breaking small loop holes for the camera in the screen of branches, I heard a rush over the dry leaves and a crash behind me and the next moment a fine panther descended on my water proof coat spread out beside me, so near that I could have touched him with my hand. He gave one grunt before I could move and vanished to the right in a couple of heavy bounds. I could see as he went that he was one of the big, forest type of panther with a beautifully marked skin. It appeared to me that he had heard me breaking the twigs, had seen the top of my topee and had mistaken me for a new type of deer. He had rushed me from about 15 feet and had presumably realised at the last moment that I was a man, and so had swerved off.

After half an hour 2 bull buffaloes arrived and drank and the bigger bull wallowed. I took 25 feet of film at 50 yards. After another half hour a small sounder of wild pig arrived, one with a litter of tiny squeakers. These were trying to take 'tea' while their mother was in the water. She was very patient with them. The pig drank and wallowed and later a young bull buffalo arrived and was filmed and at about 5 p.m., a sambhur stag (horns about 32 inches) drank and wallowed about 20 yards away. He was duly filmed also as he stood on his hind legs to eat berries of a tree. I walked back to camp about 6 p.m.

On September 19th we went up the Menik Ganga (River of Gems) for two or three miles through grand jungle reminiscent of the Wynaad. We made a hide of branches under a shady tree and filmed buffalo and pig which came within 20 yards at times to drink and wallow in the river running in shallow streams through sand and rocks. After a few hours we shifted our hide upstream and threw a few branches together under a tree, whence I issued to film spotted deer—a small herd at close quarters—and to stalk a boar in his wallow at 30 feet. A small herd of buffaloes came and settled down in the water within 30 yards. After half an hour the wind changed and they advanced snorting on the hide, while I filmed them up to 15 yards away. Finally they crashed off. There are literally hundreds of wild buffalo on this river, some of them remarkably fine bulls with thick curving horns who stand and glare and snort before crashing away to the jungle from their pools in the river. They are supposed to be dangerous but we never had a charge, though at times one seemed imminent. They make less noise than bison when galloping away into the jungle. A wild sow was seen in the distance with a family of 5 tiny striped squeakers not more than 8 inches high following her through water and over sand banks in a compact little mob. About 4 p.m. we started

slowly back and after half a mile walked right into a fine bull elephant drinking below the bank. I walked up to 15 yards, so close that I could only film him in sections, as his head alone more than filled the view finder. Finally he got our wind and turned and shuffled off to the forest on the opposite bank at a great pace.

Afterwards we saw at least 20 baby crocodiles all less than a foot long, pouring in a mob off a fallen tree into a pool and diving down to holes in the banks below water. Shortly after I stalked a small crocodile about 8 feet long to within 15 yards and filmed him before he slipped into the water. The trees in the heavy jungle along the banks are magnificent, huge trunks 8 or 10 feet in diameter in some cases.

On September 20th we went again up the Menik Ganga but saw very little, the day being over cast after rain in the night. Several small crocodiles slid into the water and I eventually stalked one to about 40 yards and filmed him. I now have only 10 feet of film left out of 250 feet. The trees on the river are alive with hornbills, the large kind with the upper casque on the bill, paradise flycatchers, kingfishers (both the common and the white-breasted) and all kinds of small song birds besides parroquets. We bathed in the evening in a pool of the river below the bungalow keeping a watch for crocodiles of which there are several big ones in the river. Last night we heard elephants trumpeting and screaming in the forest on the far bank and two wild buffaloes walked past the bungalow within 5 yards of our camp beds, as we found by their tracks this morning.

On September 21st we went back to Polatupana and on the way visited the 'Panther Pond', Rukinawala, with M, the warden and his head tracker. As we approached there were five buffaloes and several wild pig in the water and pea fowl and a herd of spotted deer on the shore, all drinking together. After seeing the panther's tracks the warden's opinion was that the panther had lain watching me at a few feet range for some time and then had deliberately attacked, but was put off by a thick thorn bough at my back, and being disconcerted by this had failed actually to strike me and had made off. This is just possible from my own knowledge of tigers and panthers, but the incident is interesting as an actual experience of how a panther stalks and rushes a deer.

On arrival at 'P' we went down to the end of the lagoon with the tracker and motor driver, where there is a big sand bar with boulders and the surf on the far side, and caught some crabs for dinner. I noticed tracks of deer in the sand along the shore.

After returning to the rest hut a Buddhist Votary, under a vow to live in the jungle, came past and we called him in and asked him about his life. He was very simple and cheerful and asked for nothing. He apparently lives among the animals and says that in the rains if he lights a fire before a cave where he shelters, the bears come up and sleep on the far side. He has apparently wandered all over Ceylon. He was very grateful for some cheroots which he said were as good to him as food.

I picked up a small Star-shell Tortoise to take back to Colombo as a pet. Later in the evening I went to try for another picture of

elephants at the tank but nothing came before dark, though later in the night several elephants were trumpeting and roaring in the water close to the hut. It is noticeable that Ceylon elephants appear much shyer than those in S. India. This may be due to the large number shot as alleged 'rogues'—I have heard of residents shooting 20 or 30 elephants—all, or nearly all, tuskless.

On September 22nd we started back at dawn and came without incident out of the dry zone to Tangalle where I filmed hawks bill turtles (from which tortoise shell comes) swimming in the clear blue water up to the beach below the rest house. M got a man to pull several lumps of white and pink brain coral off the reef for me. We got back to Colombo safely at 5 p.m.

BASE P.O.,  
COLOMBO,  
May 26, 1943.

H. G. ROSSEL,  
*Lt.-Col.*